

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Introductory Remarks

After entry of this amendment, claims 2-17 and 20 are pending in the application. Claims 2-7, 12 and 20 have been amended. Claims 1, 18 and 19 have been canceled. These amendments do not introduce new matter.

Claim Objections

The Office Action sets forth several objections of various claims to which the assignee responds as follows:

Claims 2, 5, 7 18 and 20 were noted to contain allowable subject matter and were objected to because they are dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowed if written into independent form with all intervening claimed feature.

Accordingly:

- claim 2 has been rewritten into independent form incorporating features of claim 1, and claim 1 has been canceled.
- claim 5 has been rewritten into independent form incorporating features of claims 1 and 4.
- claim 7 has been rewritten into independent form incorporating features of claims 1 and 6.
- claim 12 has been amended to recite the features of allowable claim 18, and claim 18 has been canceled.
- Claim 20 has been rewritten into independent form incorporating features of claim 19, and claim 19 canceled.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. §103 (a)

The Office Action maintains the prior rejections of various claims as being obvious under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as follows:

1. Claims 1, 3, 6, 8-15, and 17 are rejected as being unpatentable over Juergens (US Patent 5,200,909) in view of Hillier et al (Introduction to Operations Research, published 01/1995).

2. Claim 4 is rejected as being unpatentable over Juergens (US Patent 5,200,909) in view of Hillier et al (Introduction to Operations Research, published 01/1995) as applied to claim 1 and further in view of Glaser et al (US Patent 7,003,515).

3. Claim 16 is rejected as being unpatentable over Juergens (US Patent 5,200,909) in view of Hillier et al (Introduction to Operations Research, published 01/1995) as applied to claim 12 and further in view of Yamafuji et al (US Patent 5,302,262).

Applicant respectfully disagrees with these rejections. However, to expedite allowance, the claims have been amended such that all the pending independent claims recite features that the Examiner had noted were allowable over these references, as explained above. As such, the rejection is moot and should be withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

The claims as presented above are in condition for allowance. Accordingly, such allowance is now earnestly requested. The undersigned attorney for Assignee requests an Interview via telephone with the Examiner to expedite allowance of these claims.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc V. Richards", written over a horizontal line.

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